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U.S. FOREST SERVICE

FORESTRY AND OUR NATIONAL LIFE

Radio talk by F. A. Silcox, Chief Forester, United States Forest Service, on the National Farm and Home Hour, December 13, 1933, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

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This is my first opportunity as Chief Forester to talk to the listeners-in on the Farm and Home Hour. I want in a simple, brief way to tell you about some of the really great things being done to make your forests not only a permanent source of material well-being but a continual source of a richer cultural life in the recreational enjoyment of their beauty.

Our forests are indispensable to national security, to social stability, and to progress. That's rather a broad, sweeping statement, but when you stop to figure the many ways that forests serve us, the many ways they affect our well-being, you can see that it is true.

Timber, of course, is the first crop of the forest. But it is far from being the only important forest product. The forest overlaps into agriculture, industry, and transportation, and enters in countless ways in the economic and social life of the Nation. It is often the mainspring of local industry. It is what keeps many a community alive. The woods furnish building material and other materials in almost infinite variety - lumber, turpentine, chemical derivatives, paper pulp, cellulose and other products for the factory. They safeguard our water supplies; they help to regulate the flow of our streams. They give a home to game and fish for the sports-loving public, and they provide recreation and inspiration and beauty for us all.

When the depression overtook us, the forests were among the first to be called upon to help provide relief. Almost overnight, the U. S. Forest Service gave emergency employment at useful work to thousands of men in the National Forests. And this year, our forests have contributed to carrying out a large-scale emergency relief program in which more than a quarter of a million young men have been given not only employment but physical upbuilding and a chance to take a fresh start. They have been taken out of the blind alleys of despair. What it has meant to these young men can perhaps best be shown by quoting what one of them says himself. He says: "In the woods, we began to realize what conservation really means, as we learned to build trails for many uses -- and the strenuous experience drove into each of us new mental as well as physical endurance."

Once upon a time forests covered nearly half of our country. Today about one-fourth of the area of the United States is occupied by forests, and much of this remaining forest area has been culled, mistreated, and reduced in productive capacity. It will not profit this country to permit a further decrease.

For centuries this great natural resource, this unbroken forest which once cradled our young Nation, was wasted without thought for the morrow; it
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was consumed without plan, cut down without provision for reproduction of the trees or replenishment of the land. Such a policy, or rather the utter lack of a conservation policy, is explainable only by the rapidity of conquest and exploitation of a new land by a vigorous people released from the restraint of old European systems and possessing unbounded faith in the prodigality of Nature.

The public began to take notice only when they found they were having to pay high prices for forest products transported from increasing distances or from foreign countries, when local mills shut down and communities were starved out, or when the shelter and protection of the woods began to be missed by the farmer and by the citizen living in flooded areas subjected to the whims of fluctuating streamflow. Shortages of materials, high costs, wastage of good lands, repetition of floods at briefer and briefer intervals, at last began to awaken people to consciousness of their losses and roused public sentiment in favor of new policies of forest use and land management.

For more than a quarter of a century, the United States Forest Service has been working to bring into being a better system of handling our resources. The National Forests, under Forest Service management, already have shown how it can be done. They have long ago proved how much it is to the public advantage to have all of its land uses conserved and developed. But the National Forests cover only a fraction of our total forest area. The wise use of all of it is vital to public interest.

The problems of agriculture and forestry are tied together, especially in connection with the use of idle and cut-over land, and the submarginal farm. With the thousands of unprofitable farms already occupied, we are seeing right now a back-flow of industrial population from cities to rural regions, probably to clear and settle more land submarginal for agriculture. Unless some form of land-use planning is included in the general social program, prolonged hardship and immense losses are likely to result from farming much of this acreage. Against this type of land many families have broken their backs and hearts in trying to make a living.

As the annual report of the Forest Service points out, the satisfactory adjustment of our national economy to the great basic resources of soil and water calls for the right balance of forestry, agriculture, range use, and water resource use. As in the management of the National Forests, the use of all of our forest resources must be planned with due regard to the net total of public benefits to be derived.

Fortunately, we are not without a program. Time enough has elapsed for foresters to gather information on the good and bad in current land-and forest management. In response to a Senate resolution this year, the Forest Service has worked out a basis for planning in the use of our forest lands. It is known as the Copeland Report, or more specifically as "A National Plan for American Forestry." It is by far the most thorough study of this kind ever made.

The "National Plan for American Forestry" calls for aggressive measures both to promote private forestry and to build up public forests. The public part will be to encourage in various ways the private owner, and

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at the same time to bring large areas of forest land under public management where the public interest requires it. In brief, the plan calls for measures that will insure the adequate protection and proper management of our forests for continuous and permanent service to public welfare.

Forestry has moved on rapidly since last spring. A long-term program of National Forest improvement undertaken by the Forest Service has been given a running start. The lumber industry has pledged itself in its lumber code to make some definite provision for the control of destructive exploitation, and to carry out a policy of sustained-production management.

The President's Emergency Conservation Work program rapidly organized and placed 300,000 C. C. C. men in the forests of the Nation, building protective works, doing improvement jobs and carrying out conservation measures much needed. For that part of the work under its supervision, the Forest Service selected thousands of previously planned projects believed most suitable for these inexperienced but willing young men. Nearly 600 camps were located in the National Forests and 660 more were placed on projects in the State forests and on private lands where protection work was in the public interest.

What are the fruits of a half-year of labor in forestry?

First, I believe, is a clearer social vision shared by a vastly increased proportion of the public, that forests and lands and their products are matters of public concern, that it is most important to administer, use, and conserve them for the benefit of all the people.

Next is the wider realization that a practical solution of the forest resource problem of the Nation must take into consideration the proper use of private as well as public land, and that the private owners and the public must work together for a planned and coordinated use of the forests.

After these, come the physical facts of splendid work accomplished. Some 5,000 miles of protection roads and trails have been built, millions of trees planted, a million acres cleared of insect pests and diseases. Thousands of dams were built for erosion control. Something like 100 different kinds of forest jobs have been done on a large scale by forest rangers, guards, and the great force of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Work in the forests has relieved unemployment in many communities, and has given good jobs to thousands of young men from the cities and towns, and to ex-soldiers and local woodsmen. In bringing unemployed young men from the cities to a new life in the great outdoors, the Civilian Conservation Corps has been a conspicuous example of successful emergency relief work. To the destitute families of these men has gone the major portion of their earnings.

The potentialities of forestry in building and maintaining a sound social system are so great that, no matter how richly endowed we are in other basic national wealth, we cannot afford to neglect to provide for

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the permanent welfare of our forest resources. Forestry today must spare no effort to define its true place in the changing social order. It must accept its responsibilities and put purpose and strength into measures to increase the sum of human happiness.

That is the challenge that lies before the Forest Service. And we are doing our best to meet it.

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